

State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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MEMBER
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

DATE: February 22, 2012

RE: SB 24 – AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

I would like to thank the Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Andrea Stillman and Representative Andrew Fleischmann, the Honorable Vice Chairs Senator John Fonfara and Representative Douglas McCrory, the Ranking Members Senator Toni Boucher and Representative Marilyn Giuliano, and the entire membership of the Education Committee for their time this morning.

On behalf of the citizens of Easton, Redding and Weston, thank you in advance for the hard work needed to advance SB 24 and the proposals contained therein. While the bill contains many positive initiatives, I write to express my concerns about the "small district" consolidation measures in Section 11, and in particular, the negative impact such measures would have on the Easton, Redding and Region 9 School Districts.

Easton, Redding and Region 9 School Districts

The Towns of Easton and Redding each have a separate school district and separate board for their K-8 schools. In 1957, Easton and Redding joined to form Region 9 and Joel Barlow High School ("JBHS") via a separate board of education. These three school districts are administered in common by one superintendent and other key central office staff, and the three boards work together to achieve their common mission of educational excellence in a fiscally sound manner.

Indeed, in just the last twelve months, Easton's Helen Keller Middle School was awarded the 2011 Blue Ribbon Schools Award from the U.S. Department of Education (one of only four Connecticut public schools among the 255 public schools recognized nationwide), and Redding's John Read Middle school is in line for the same honor in 2012. Similarly, JBHS's principal, Tom McMorran, was just honored by the Connecticut Association of Schools as Principal of the Year. These accolades follow years of superior academic performance and other notable successes – all achieved under a cooperative and centralized management structure.

Senate Bill 24, Section 11

As currently written, Section 11 purportedly seeks to "incentivize small district consolidation" by *reducing* state educational funding to districts with fewer than 1000 students if the district spends more per pupil than the state average. This is simply shocking. Indeed, small towns like Easton and Redding already spend more on education per student compared to many other communities despite receiving *vastly* less in proportional state funding. Punishing towns for doing more can not and should not be touted as reform.

Moreover, the towns of Easton and Redding have already achieved the financial and educational goals that Section 11 purportedly seeks to "incentivize" by consolidating over fifty years ago. Of course, consolidation may work for certain towns under certain circumstances, and thus should be explored at the local level -- not imposed from Hartford. Regrettably, the current bill makes no allowances for the small districts such as ours that already operate on a consolidated basis. Would the 1000 pupil trigger apply to each district, to Easton and Redding but not Region 9, or to all districts together? The bill appears to ignore our particular situation.

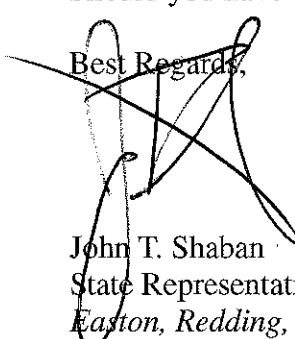
Simply put, Section 11 (as presently written) is a poorly conceived, blunderbuss approach to educational reform that ignores the tenet of local control, differences between Connecticut's varying communities, and the successful and long-existing paradigm that already exists in Easton and Redding.

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Clearly we as a Legislature can not promote the degradation of successful school districts as a way of narrowing the achievement gap with districts that have not been as successful. We should promote positive measures in the districts that need help, and not punitive measures in the districts that have the willingness and means to support their schools.

I look forward to working with the members of this Committee to either strike Section 11 in its entirety, and/or reform the language to address the concerns expressed herein. Thank you for your time. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Best Regards,



John T. Shaban
State Representative, 135th District
Easton, Redding, Weston